

RECORD OF DECISION
for
USDA Forest Service

Final Environmental Impact Statement

GRAND MESA, UNCOMPAHGRE AND GUNNISON NATIONAL FORESTS
LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Delta, Garfield, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Mesa, Montrose,
Ouray, Saguache, San Juan, and Miguel Counties, Colorado

I. INTRODUCTION

This Record of Decision documents the approval of the Land and Resource Management Plan (Plan) for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests. The Plan is a long-range program for all natural resource management activities and establishes management requirements for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests. The Plan identifies the resource management practices, the projected levels of production of goods and services and management, and the location where resource management activities may occur on the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests.

The Plan was prepared under the 1979 National Forest Management Act (NFMA) implementing regulations (36 CFR 219). It will be implemented under the revised 1982 regulations. When the Plan is scheduled to be revised it will be brought into conformance with the 1982 NFMA implementing regulations.

All NFMA citations are to the 1982 implementing regulations unless otherwise noted.

The Plan provides for the coordinated multiple-use of outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, minerals, wildlife and fish, and wilderness in the management of the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests, resulting in sustained yields of goods and services for the benefit of the American people.

Major features of the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison Forests Plan are:

A. EXPECTED FUTURE CONDITION

The Plan identifies the desired condition of the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests to be achieved in the future. This is presented in the Goals section of Chapter III of the Plan page III-2. The goal statements describe a desired condition to be achieved some time in the future. Goals are timeless but form the basis for developing objectives (36 CFR 219.3).

B. OBJECTIVES

The Plan establishes management objectives for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests. These objectives are presented in Chapter III of the Plan, pages III-5 through III-13. The objectives are statements of measurable results that respond to pre-established goals (36 CFR 219.3). These objectives are quantitatively displayed as outputs that could be provided or activities that are expected to occur. The objectives were derived through a systematic interdisciplinary process used to develop alternatives summarized in Chapter II of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). It must be understood that there is no warranty or guarantee that these objectives will be achieved. These objectives are contingent upon many factors such as budget levels, changes in laws and regulations, or natural disasters.

C. MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS

The Plan establishes management requirements which control and govern activities on the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests. These begin on page III-14, in Forest Plan. The Plan includes Forest Direction and Management Prescriptions. Forest Direction details overall management requirements that apply to the entire Forest during Plan implementation. Forest Direction is applied in addition to the management requirements of Management Prescriptions. The Plan assigns Management Prescriptions to specific land areas within the Forest. The management requirements provide the specific management practices and intensity of practices which may occur to attain goals and objectives and to address issues and concerns. All practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm are incorporated in the Forest Direction and Management Prescriptions. Mitigation is summarized in Chapter IV, Final EIS, page IV-134. Forest Direction and Management Prescriptions are displayed in Plan, Chapter III page III-10. The Plan map displays the Management Prescription assigned to each management area of the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests.

D. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Plan establishes monitoring and evaluation requirements to identify how well the goals and objectives of the Plan are met. The monitoring procedure is displayed in Plan Chapter IV.

E. IMPLEMENTATION

The Plan includes proposed schedules for implementing Forest Service activities. These schedules are in Plan Appendices A through E, G, J, K, M through P, and R. The Forest Supervisor has authority under this Plan and 36 CFR 219.10(e) to change the proposed implementation schedules to reflect differences between proposed annual budgets and actual appropriated budget levels.

F. WILDERNESS SUITABILITY OR UNSUITABILITY

The Plan reflects my recommendation on suitability or unsuitability of the Fossil Ridge Wilderness Study Area (WSA) and the Cannibal Plateau Further Planning Area (FPA) for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

G. WILDERNESS AREAS COVERED IN THIS RECORD OF DECISION

The Plan includes management direction for the entire La Garita and Raggeds Wildernesses. This includes 24,164 acres of the La Garita administered by the Rio Grande National Forest and 16,578 acres of the Raggeds administered by the White River National Forest. The San Juan National Forest Plan will include management direction for the entire Lizard Head Wilderness. This includes 18,600 acres managed by the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests. The White River National Forest Plan will include management direction for the Maroon-Bells-Snowmass Wilderness and the Collegiate Peaks Wilderness. This includes 18,840 acres and 48,000 acres respectively, managed by the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests.

The Plan establishes broad direction and does not attempt to anticipate and resolve every short-term problem or conflict which may arise in managing the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests. A key feature of the Plan is that it can be adjusted through rescheduling, amendment, or revision.

The Final EIS describes a proposed course of action and alternatives to the proposed action for managing the land and resources of the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests. The Final EIS describes the environment to be affected and discloses the potential environmental consequences of implementing the proposed action and alternatives to that action. Preparing an EIS is required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Council on Environmental Quality regulations Title 40, Code of Federal Regulations, Parts 1500-1508 (40 CFR 1500-1508); and in the implementing regulations of the National Forest Management Act Title 36, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 219 (36 CFR 219). Forest Plan preparation was also guided by the Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act of 1960.

There were no changes or modifications to the Proposed Land and Resource Management Plan, related to this decision, that are not included in the Plan.

II. ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Public issues, management concerns and management opportunities were identified in the scoping processes in the planning effort. These were used to formulate planning questions displayed in the Final EIS, page I-5. Planning questions were formulated from issues, concerns, and opportunities to ensure the planning effort was geared to problem recognition and analysis, to alternatives for action on manageable problems, and to monitoring for reporting back to the public. In addition, the expected future condition of the forest as it relates to each planning question is discussed beginning on page II-76 of the Plan.

The issues, concerns, and management opportunities identified at the beginning of this planning process did not substantially change. One new issue emerged during review of the Draft EIS. This issue was expressed as a request to increase timber harvest volume to justify the large capital expenditure required to establish a modern processing facility. This issue became a facet of Planning Question 8 - How should Forest products be managed to supply commercial and non-commercial demands on the Forest?

III. WILDERNESS STUDY AREA RECOMMENDATION

I recommend the Fossil Ridge WSA as unsuitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. A legislative EIS for Fossil Ridge will be prepared based on information and analysis disclosed in the Final EIS for the Plan and an analysis of the records of the public hearings. This legislative EIS with my recommendation will receive further review and possible modification in the offices of the Chief of the Forest Service, the Secretary of Agriculture, and the President of the United States. After the President transmits the Administration's final recommendation to Congress, the legislative EIS will be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency and distributed to the public. Until Congress acts, the Fossil Ridge WSA will be managed to maintain its existing wilderness character while still permitting existing uses. Livestock grazing and dispersed motorized recreation will continue and range structural improvements can be maintained or constructed.

This is a recommendation in response to a legislative mandate in the Colorado Wilderness Act of 1980, (PL 96-560) and is not appealable under 36 CFR 211.18. The existing wilderness character of the area and its potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System will be maintained as provided for in Section 105(c) of the Act.

IV. DECISION

I have reviewed the affirmative and opposing views and environmental consequences of the Plan and the alternatives to the Plan which were disclosed in the Final EIS. I have also reviewed the public issues and management concerns identified during the scoping process for this Plan. These issues and concerns are disclosed in the Final EIS Chapter I, Page I-10 through I-17.

Additionally, I gave particular attention to public comments on the Draft EIS presented in Chapter VI of the Final EIS. The planning actions described in the NFMA regulations (36 CFR 219.5, (1979)) have been completed and are properly documented. Similar requirements appear in the 1982 regulations (36 CFR 219.12).

It is, therefore, my decision to approve Alternative 1 as described in the Final EIS as the Plan for management of the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests.

The Continental Divide National Scenic Trail location is displayed on the Forest Plan map. The trail from Tincup to Monarch Pass will be identified in the Pike and San Isabel National Forest Plan.

The recommendations on lands available for mineral leasing are displayed on the Forest Plan map and discussed in Chapter III of the Plan. Lease issuance on National Forest System land on which the "No-Surface Occupancy" stipulation applies does not guarantee ground access across adjacent National Forest System land without further environmental analysis. In addition, lease issuance does not guarantee access across adjacent land which is not part of the National Forest System.

Existing roads will be open, restricted, closed, or obliterated to manage public and administrative road traffic. Forest Service road management is determined by maintenance costs, resource management objectives, and user safety. Keeping roads open and maintained provides benefits related to access for firewood collection and dispersed recreation, but has impact on wildlife seclusion and road maintenance and land management costs. All management activities are designed to be compatible with areas open, restricted, or closed. All newly developed roads with a single purpose will be closed to non-project public use. Exceptions may be made where justification for public use of the road and associated land area is demonstrated.

Neither the East River nor the Taylor River are eligible for further consideration for inclusion in Wild and Scenic River System.

The Tabeguache (350 acres) and Escalante Creek (61 acres) areas are recommended for establishment as Research Natural Areas. Their management includes preserving, protecting, studying, and interpreting the biotic communities. /

I also recommend that 13,599 acres of the Cannibal Plateau Further Planning Area are suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The remaining 18,391 acres are unsuitable and allocated to non-wilderness uses.

A Legislative EIS for Cannibal Plateau FPA will be prepared. This legislative EIS will be submitted to the Washington Office of the Forest Service. It with my recommendation will receive further review and possible modification in the offices of the Chief of the Forest Service, the Secretary of Agriculture, and the President of the United States. If the wilderness recommendation is affirmed, the President will transmit the Administration's final recommendation to Congress. The legislative EIS will be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency and distributed to the public.

This decision is fully described in Chapter III of the Plan.

V. REASONS FOR THE DECISION

A. INTRODUCTION

This section describes the significant considerations on which the Plan decisions are based. These considerations are described in the Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities as reflected in the Planning Questions and identified throughout the planning documents. They are also described in response to comments made on the Draft EIS and proposed Plan, as documented

in the Final EIS, Chapter VI. The paramount considerations leading to the decisions, outlined in Section IV above, are discussed below.

Most of the results of this decision will not be apparent in the immediate future to the casual observer, as similar activities have been occurring for many years. The key for achieving the goals and objectives of this Plan is a healthy Forest. Many results of this decision will occur over the long-term through vegetation treatment. The Plan provides for using vegetation treatment as a practical and efficient method to achieve many goals and objectives.

Vegetation treatment is a management technique for administering the natural resources to attain the overall goal of a healthy, vigorous forest. It is used to manage existing plant communities to best meet vegetation needs and resource goals and objectives. Vegetation treatment can also increase productivity of the land; it is guided by the management requirements of the Plan.

When vast acreages of forest cover are uniformly mature, wildlife diversity is limited to the relatively few species which are dependent on mature forests. Burning, cutting, or other vegetation treatments will increase vegetation diversity which will provide a diversity of wildlife habitat and wildlife species.

Treatment also reduces the amounts of unwanted fuels which can increase potential for wildfire. Mature and overmature forests are more susceptible to epidemic insect attack. An attack can spread over large areas creating undesirable effects. Insect or disease epidemics create conditions similar to large burns or clearcuts, but with the additional potential for wildfire due to the additional fuels created. If age, size class, and species diversity are enhanced the risk of wide spread epidemic is reduced.

Water yield maintenance and increase also result from vegetation treatment. Other outputs and effects as diverse as maintaining visual quality and firewood availability are closely related to the amount of vegetation treated.

B. REASONS

Following are specific factors considered in selecting Alternative 1. They are grouped in eight categories. No single factor determined the decision. Rather, all factors were considered in balance in making the decision. Based on a consideration of all factors, including monetary and non-monetary costs and benefits, I feel the decision will result in the greatest benefit to the public.

Compatibility With Other Public Agency Goals

The goals of other public agencies which could be affected by National Forest management were requested early in the planning process and used to help develop the alternatives in the Draft EIS. Comments received on the Draft EIS identified objectives which were not previously revealed were considered in the Final EIS. See Chapter VI Final EIS for agency letters.

Compatibility with other agency goals was evaluated in terms of dependency on the land and resources managed by the Forest.

--The habitat requirements for increased numbers of deer and elk on the Forest discussed by the Colorado State-Wide Comprehensive Plan for National Forests will be met in all alternatives except 4, 6 and 9.

--The 1981 State of Colorado Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), prepared by the State of Colorado, recommends that the Forest provide additional opportunities for picnicking, four-wheeling and downhill skiing. The Plan and the other alternatives in the EIS meet projected demand for these activities through the year 2030.

--The State of Colorado has registered three areas to be included in the Colorado Natural Areas Program; i.e., the Mt. Emmons Iron Bog, Uncompahgre Fritillary Butterfly Habitat and Slumgullion Earthflow. The Slumgullion Earthflow is recognized as a Colorado Natural Area in the Forest Plan. The area recommended by the State for Fritillary Butterfly Habitat is within the Big Blue Wilderness which offers adequate protection. Therefore, the Forest Plan will not recognize the habitat as a natural area.

--The Mt. Emmons Iron Bog will be protected from activities detrimental to its maintaining the habitat of *Drosera rotundifolia* L. This is a small carnivorous round-leaf sundew plant located in peaty or wet acidic soils. Projected mining activities on adjacent private land may affect the bog. Close coordination will be necessary when and if mining begins.

--The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is concerned that their management options may be limited on BLM land adjacent to National Forest System land where access to potential oil and gas leases is restricted on the National Forest. The BLM feels they may be forced to allow access in areas where roads may be undesirable. This occurs in all alternatives. This is a potential problem that could effect the BLM. The Forest Service will continue to work with the BLM to provide access where it is appropriate. The Forest Service may initiate a change in leasing recommendations after the BLM has identified areas across which they will not permit access.

--Local counties have used live streams as a source of gravel. Forest requirements for management of riparian areas will curtail this traditional use. See Prescription 9A of the Plan, Page III-238.

--Some counties feel that if the Forest Service does not continue to meet increased demand for developed recreation, it will result in an adverse effect on the counties economic goals. The proposed action will meet 96 percent of projected demand for developed recreation by the year 2000 with a gradual decrease to 79 percent by 2030. That portion of demand not met by National Forest System land is expected to be met by the private sector and other government agencies. If this occurs, the anticipated adverse effects will not materialize. Alternatives 6 and 8 would achieve the same capacity levels as the proposed action. Alternatives 2, 5 and 7 would meet 91 percent of demand by the year 2000 and 58 percent by 2030. Alternatives 3 and 4 would meet 100 percent of demand through 2030 and Alternative 9 would not meet any increases in projected demand beyond 1986.

--During informal consultation, the Fish and Wildlife Service, USDI, indicated the Plan analysis should consider three additional threatened and endangered fish species. These species are: Colorado Squawfish, *Ptychocheilus lucius* ; Humpback Chub, *Gila cypha* ; and Razorback Sucker, *Xyrauchen texanus* . None of the fish have been found on the Forest and the identified occupied and historical ranges are far removed from the Forest.

Stability of Industries Needed to Produce Regional Outputs of Goods and Services

A major consideration in selecting Alternative 1 is that it provides for future increases in those National Forest resources and uses which contribute to local industries. The principal industries relying on National Forest resources and use are tourism, timber, and ranching.

All of the alternatives and the proposed action would meet the demand for dispersed recreation, wilderness use, and downhill skiing throughout the 50 year planning horizon. The total estimated demand for developed recreation will not be met by Alternative 1. Total recreation use and related employment and income in the tourism industry is expected to increase.

Alternatives 4, 6 and 9 would offer less timber volume than that which is needed to maintain the stability of local timber industry. The proposed action and other alternatives would maintain the timber industry dependent on the Forest.

The Plan and other alternatives improve range conditions, and increase grazing capacity and permitted livestock beyond the current level.

Social and Economic Stability

Effects on minority groups and civil rights, distribution of goods and services, payment of taxes, receipts, payments to local governments, and income and employment were considered in selecting Alternative 1.

Management requirements in the Plan are expected to enhance the social stability of the area surrounding the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests. The Plan does not introduce any change which would significantly alter the existing social structures. It promotes continuation of the existing lifestyles which are dependent upon use and management of the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests. Emphasis on vegetation treatment, through commercial activities, and the continued emphasis on livestock grazing will help maintain the existing rural lifestyle predominant in the planning area. Provisions for ski area expansion, meeting total demand for dispersed recreation, and meeting a substantial portion of the increased demand in developed recreation should benefit the tourism industry.

The Plan will have a positive impact on the following:

--Minority groups and Civil Rights - Effects will result from internal Forest Service programs in which members of minority groups and women are hired directly by the Agency, and external opportunities in which

members of minority groups and women could work on Forest Service projects through contracts and permits. Currently, approximately ten percent of the dollar value of all contracts are set aside as "8A" contracts, reserved by the Small Business Administration to develop minority and women contractors. Much of the employment generated by tourism, which is expected to increase, is service oriented. These jobs are traditionally filled by a high percentage of women.

--Distribution of goods and services - There will be substantial increases in livestock grazing, timber production, and recreation; including downhill skiing and hunting and fishing. Water production and wildlife winter range carrying capacity will be increased.

--Payment of taxes - There will be a direct correlation between increased levels of economic activity generated by implementation of the Plan and the amount of taxes collected by governments and provide public services.

--Receipts - Receipts collected by the Federal government will increase as a result of increased timber volume sold, increased permitted livestock numbers, and increased developed recreation.

--Payments to local governments - Local governments will benefit financially as their share of receipts is increased commensurate with increased outputs.

--Income - Income in those economic sectors affected by implementation of the Plan will increase.

--Employment - The Plan will contribute to a stable work force as economic diversity is increased through an increase in the timber industry.

Energy Efficiency In Terms of Production And Consumption

Production energy is energy consumed in managing the resource. Consumption energy is energy consumed in using the resource. Energy efficiency is calculated by achieving the lowest possible ratio between energy consumed and units produced.

Because the Plan provides for intensive resource management and for recreation use levels which are not substantially lower than many of the alternatives with lower management intensities, it ranks Fourth highest in total energy consumption. There is an estimated 9 percent difference in energy consumption between Alternative 2 which has the least consumption and the Plan.

Response to Public Issues

Many issues raised during the Forest planning process are conflicting. Resolving an issue favorably may result in resolving another issue unfavorably from the viewpoint of the person who raised that issue. No alternative was able to favorably resolve all public issues.

The Plan provides direction to:

--Meet 100 percent of the projected demand for developed recreation in the First decade. The percent demand met will reduce to 96, 89, 82 and 79 percent in decades 2 through 5. Total developed recreation capacity is expected to increase from 744,000 RVDs in decade 1 to 1,012,000 RVDs annually in decade 5.

--Meet projected demand for downhill skiing opportunities by expanding existing sites.

--Meet the demand projected for motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities.

--Manage approximately 17 percent of the Forest for semi-primitive non-motorized recreation. Trail management will be emphasized, 30 percent of the existing Forest trail mileage will be reconstructed during the first decade. Fifty miles will be constructed or reconstructed annually over the planning horizon.

--Emphasize primitive settings in designated wilderness.

--Recommend 13,599 acres of Cannibal Plateau FPA suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. This could increase the total wilderness acres on the Forest to 515,376 acres, 17 percent of the total Forest area. The remaining 18,391 acres are allocated to non-wilderness uses. The recommendation of suitable and decision to allocate to non-wilderness use is based on the suitability analysis and disclosure of effects documented in the Final EIS. (See index in Appendix I, Final EIS for location of information.) The 13,599 acre suitable area is capable, available, and needed for wilderness based on the analysis in Chapter IV of the Final EIS. The major considerations in recommending the 13,599 acre portion suitable is the need to compliment and reduce conflicts with the recommended Powderhorn Wilderness. The remaining 18,391 acres is not needed to complement the recommended Powderhorn Wilderness and is needed to maintain the existing special uses and potential for motorized recreation (snowmobiling).

--Recommend the Fossil Ridge WSA unsuitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The analysis of suitability and disclosure of effects is documented in the Final EIS. The six factors used in the need analysis indicated the area is not needed for wilderness. Also, the availability analysis indicated the area is unsuitable for wilderness based on non-wilderness values foregone of which the greatest is minerals.

--Provide 590,386 acres be managed for wildlife habitat emphasis. Vegetation diversity is enhanced. Vegetation treatment through a variety of vegetation treatment methods.

--Increase National Forest System winter range carrying capacity 6 percent in the first decade. This is due to the aspen habitat management and increased prescribed burning programs. Aspen treatment will be maintained at 500 acres annually, over the planning horizon. Prescribed burning is scheduled for 5,500 acres annually after 1985.

--Increase permitted livestock grazing 5 percent, to 335,800 AUMs grazed annually over the 50-year planning horizon. Range condition will be good with a stable trend. Grazing capacity is increased by increasing investments in structural and non-structural range improvements.

--Schedule for offer 350 million board feet of timber for sale during the period 1984 through 1993. Some commentators on the Draft EIS commented that the timber harvest levels were too high, others that they were too low. See Planning Question 8, Chapter VI of the Final EIS. To respond to local

interest in accelerating the timber harvest schedule and to meet the objectives of vegetation treatment as cost effectively as possible, 35 MMBF will be offered in 1984, and 55 MMBF will be offered annually in 1985 through 1987. See Continental Lumber Company's comment, Planning Question 8, Comment 8, and Montrose City's and County Commissioner's Resolutions Numbers 17 and 18 of the agency comment letters, Chapter VI, Final EIS. A review of the local demand situation will be made prior to the end of 1987 to determine if local demand for timber has significantly changed. If local demand for timber changes significantly, this Plan will be reanalyzed as required by NFMA Regulations, 36 CFR 219.10(c). If local demand has not significantly changed, the remainder of the 350 MMBF planned for the decade will be offered in 1988 through 1993 at a rate of 25 MMBF annually. Any of the volume offered but not sold in the first 4 years will still be available for re-offer. See Final EIS, Chapter IV, TIMBER, and Plan, Chapter III, Table III-1.

--Permit uses that do not degrade water quality below Federal, State or local water quality standards.

--Increase water yields over the first ten years to achieve 10,898 acre feet more per year over the current situation. This will be accomplished through vegetation treatment. By the fifth decade water yield will increase to 19,410 acre feet per year, .7 percent over the current situation.

--Encourage environmentally sound energy and minerals development, coordinate mineral extraction with surface resource management, integrate mineral exploration and development within the National Forest System with the use and protection of other resource values, and emphasize oil, gas, geothermal, and mineral exploration and development outside wilderness areas.

--Improve cost effectiveness and efficiency in Forest Service road management. Coordinate transportation facilities to meet the needs of the Forest, provide a safe, efficient and environmentally sound transportation system, and implement an effective travel management program. The Plan schedules construction or reconstruction for 57 miles of arterial, 45 miles of collector, 216 miles of local road and 15 bridges in the first 10 years. Roads will be open, restricted, closed, or obliterated as determined by maintenance costs, resource management objectives, and user safety.

--Ensure that National Forest System land is accessible to meet Forest Service objectives and support management activities.

--Encourage using existing utility corridors before developing new corridors.

--Analyze 89,250 acres for possible jurisdictional land transfer to the BLM. The Forest has also tentatively identified 265,280 acres of BLM administered land for possible jurisdictional land transfer to the Forest.

--There are no Ranger District boundary changes proposed in the Plan.

--Protect significant cultural resources by avoidance and/or study. Cultural resource sensitivity areas will be determined by use of a predictive model. In areas of high sensitivity, cultural resources surveys will be conducted prior to ground disturbing activities.

--Meet or exceed minimum visual quality objectives established for the Forest.

Environmental Quality

Each alternative could produce some short-term environmental consequences. These consequences would be within legal limits where limits exist. There will be some adverse effects that cannot be avoided.

Mitigation measures are incorporated into Forest Direction, Chapter III of the Plan to minimize environmental damage.

Management direction in Alternative 1 will maintain air quality within legal limits.

Soil erosion will be within defined acceptable tolerance limits. Natural long-term soil productivity will be maintained; management emphasis will be aimed at improving or restoring previously deteriorated soil conditions.

Water quality will meet or exceed water quality standards.

Plant and animal diversity will be enhanced. Vegetation treatment programs will be designed to increase plant diversity. Management requirements specified for the management indicator species will assure adequate wildlife habitat diversity. These will improve animal diversity.

Economic Efficiency

The Plan is economically efficient providing for an estimated incremental Present Net Value (PNV) of 145.8 million dollars using a four percent discount rate. The following displays those alternatives which come closer to maximizing PNV [36 CFR 219.12(j)].

Alternative	Million Dollars
9	183.8
2	154.1
7	152.6
5	152.6
6	152.3
8	151.0
4	148.4

Benchmark 3, as discussed in Chapter II and Appendix C of the Final EIS, provides a general indication of cost efficient levels of resource production. Based on the Benchmark 3 analysis, the following resources would be produced at cost efficient level through implementation of the Plan: winter range carrying capacity, developed recreation, downhill skiing, and wilderness.

Those levels of resources which differ from the cost efficient levels established in Benchmark 3 are: timber, which is greater than the cost efficient level; livestock grazing, which is less than the cost efficient level; and dispersed recreation, which is above the cost efficient level.

The reason for these differences are to meet goals and objectives other than cost efficiency. These other goals and objectives do not contribute directly to PNV.

Changes in Management Direction

The Forest planning process included a determination of the need to change management direction. This was accomplished by assessing the current situation, determining output production potentials, and reviewing the public issues and management concerns. Several possible changes in management direction were identified. These changes include:

- Increasing the emphasis on vegetation treatment where it will meet multiple-use objectives and goals of the Plan and meet the needs of the vegetation.
- Opening, closing or obliterating roads will be determined by maintenance costs, resource management objectives, and user safety.
- Increasing developed recreation capacity.
- Increasing fisheries habitat.
- Meeting demand for firewood.
- Increasing water yield.

Alternative 1 incorporates these management changes. It programs intensive vegetation treatment designed to provide and maintain a healthy, vigorous forest environment capable of producing a range of outputs of goods and services and activities.

Alternative 1 increases developed recreation capacity from 744,000 RVDs to 1,012,000 RVDs annually, increases fisheries habitat, meets the demand for firewood, and increases water yield.

VI. DECISION PROCESS

A. ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

The alternative formulation process is disclosed in the Final EIS page II-3. There were no significant changes between the Draft and Final EIS. Those changes that did occur are identified in the Final EIS Page I-14 through I-17.

Nine alternatives were considered in detail. These nine, including the proposed action, were formulated through application of different combinations of management area prescriptions. Each alternative considered in detail incorporates a common set of management standards and guidelines to ensure true "multiple-use" management as well as mitigation measures which protect environmental quality. Each alternative represents a technically and legally feasible system of management for the Forest. The alternatives address the planning questions derived from the scoping process, and take into consideration anticipated changes in demand for Forest resources.

A brief description of the nine alternatives considered in detail follows:

Alternative 1 - Forest Plan

The Plan emphasizes intensive management for market output opportunities. This emphasis provides the opportunity to maintain or enhance the stability of industries needed to produce local and regional goods and services. Range, timber, and water exceed the current levels. Three hundred fifty million board feet of timber will be offered for sale during the period 1984 through 1993. To respond to local interest in accelerating the timber harvest schedule, 35 MMBF will be offered in 1984, and 55 MMBF will be offered annually in 1985 through 1987. A review of the local demand situation will be made prior to the end of 1987 to determine if local demand for timber has significantly changed. If local demand for timber changes significantly, the Plan will be reanalyzed as required by NFMA Regulation 36 CFR 219.10(f). If local demand has not significantly changed, the remainder of the 350 MMBF planned for the decade will be offered in 1988 through 1993 at a rate of 25 MMBF annually. Any of the volume offered but not sold in the first 4 years will be available for re-offer.

The alternative will meet 79 percent of total developed recreation demand at the end of the 50-year planning horizon. This allows the private sector to meet part of the demand for developed recreation. In this alternative 13,599 acres of Cannibal Plateau FPA are suitable; the remaining 18,391 acres of Cannibal Plateau FPA and all of Fossil Ridge WSA are unsuitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Demand for dispersed recreation opportunities outside wilderness will be met. Trail management and reconstruction is emphasized. Trails, trailheads, and other improvements are constructed or reconstructed to help disperse recreationists. Vegetation treatment is planned for approximately 16,100 acres per year during the first ten years.

Alternative 2 - (Current Program - No Action)

Alternative 2 projects current management modified by the minimum NFMA requirements and regional policy. This is the "no action" alternative required by the NEPA regulations. It responds to present program levels and provides a basis for comparison of other alternatives. The demand above existing capacity for developed recreation opportunities is not met. Current direction provides for dispersed recreation opportunities and wildlife habitat improvement. Cannibal Plateau FPA and Fossil Ridge WSA are suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Livestock grazing increases. Wood fiber production and vegetation treatment are used to meet other resource goals. Programmed timber sales offered equal 28 million board feet per year in the first ten years. Vegetation treatment would occur on approximately 14,200 acres per year during the alternative's first ten years. The current approved timber management plan annual yield on standard and special component land is 35 million board feet per year.

Alternative 3 - (1980 RPA Program)

The RPA alternative emphasizes intensive management for market output opportunities. The Forest would meet its share of local, regional, and national demand for goods and services. The outputs are reflected in the 1980 RPA goals and objectives assigned to the Forest. The alternative would meet the increased demand for developed recreation over the planning horizon. Demand for dispersed recreation outside wilderness is met.

*Cannibal Plateau FPA and Fossil Ridge WSA are unsuitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Range, timber, and water exceed their current levels. Vegetation treatment would occur on approximately 16,500 acres per year during the first ten years.

Alternative 4 - (Non-Market Opportunities)

Alternative 4 emphasizes non-market opportunities. Market output levels are designed to complement non-market opportunities. The demand for developed recreation is met over the 50-year planning horizon. The demand for dispersed recreation opportunities outside wilderness is met. Trail management is emphasized. Trails, trailheads, and other improvements are constructed or reconstructed to help disperse recreationists. In this alternative 31,990 acres of Cannibal Plateau FPA and 47,400 acres of Fossil Ridge WSA are recommended suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The alternative schedules wildlife habitat improvement. Permitted livestock grazing and timber harvest outputs are decreased from current levels. Vegetation treatment would occur on approximately 12,800 acres per year during the first ten years.

Alternative 5 - (Market Opportunities)

Alternative 5 emphasizes intensive management for market output opportunities. Market outputs provide the opportunity to maintain or enhance the stability of industries needed to produce local and regional goods and services. Range, timber, and water exceed the current levels. The demand above existing capacity for developed recreation is not met. This allows the private sector to meet part of the demand for developed recreation opportunities. The alternative provides dispersed recreation opportunities and wildlife habitat improvement. Cannibal Plateau FPA and Fossil Ridge WSA are recommended unsuitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Permitted livestock grazing increases by 9 percent. Programmed timber sales offered increase to 35 million board feet in the first ten years. Vegetation treatment would occur on approximately 16,100 acres per year during the first ten years.

Alternative 6

Alternative 6 emphasizes non-market outputs. Market output levels are designed to complement non-market opportunities. This alternative would meet 79 percent of the total developed recreation demand at the end of the 50-year planning horizon. This allows the private sector to meet part of the demand for developed recreation opportunities. The demand for dispersed recreation opportunities outside of wilderness is met. Trail management would be emphasized. Trails, trailheads, and other improvements are constructed or reconstructed to help disperse recreationists. In this alternative 13,599 acres of Cannibal Plateau FPA and 34,300 acres of Fossil Ridge WSA are recommended unsuitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The alternative provides for wildlife habitat improvement. Permitted livestock grazing AUMs and timber harvest outputs are decreased from current levels. Vegetation treatment would occur on approximately 12,700 acres per year during the first ten years.

Alternative 7

Alternative 7 emphasizes intensive management for market outputs. Market emphasis provides the opportunity to maintain the stability of industries needed to produce local and regional goods and services. Range, timber, and water exceed their current levels. The demand above existing capacity for developed recreation opportunities is not met. The alternative provides dispersed recreation opportunities and wildlife habitat improvement. In this alternative 31,990 acres of Cannibal Plateau FPA and 47,400 acres of Fossil Ridge WSA are suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Permitted livestock grazing increases by 9 percent. Programmed timber sales offered equals 30 million board feet in the first ten years. Vegetation treatment would occur on approximately 15,700 acres per year during the first ten years.

Alternative 8

Alternative 8 is designed to increase water yield. This alternative emphasizes intensive management for market outputs. It emphasizes increasing water yield through vegetation treatment. Timber resources are managed intensively and silvicultural treatments are designed to increase water yield. Permitted livestock grazing would increase 5 percent. This alternative would meet 79.0 percent of the total developed recreation demand at the end of the 50-year planning horizon. This allows the private sector to meet part of the demand for developed recreation opportunities. The alternative provides dispersed recreation opportunities and wildlife habitat improvement. Trail management will not be emphasized. In this alternative 13,599 acres of Cannibal Plateau FPA are suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System; Fossil Ridge WSA is unsuitable. Vegetation treatment would occur on approximately 17,100 acres per year during the first ten years.

Alternative 9 - (Reduced Budget)

Alternative 9 emphasizes management for market outputs under a 25 percent reduced budget when compared to fiscal year 1982. The alternative displays outputs, benefits, and costs associated with a reduced budget. Developed recreation capacity is reduced below 1981 levels. Demand for developed recreation is not met. This allows the private sector to meet part of the demand for developed recreation opportunities. The Alternative maintains dispersed recreation opportunities. Cannibal Plateau FPA and Fossil Ridge WSA are unsuitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Permitted livestock grazing AUMs and timber harvest volume decrease from current levels. Vegetation treatment would occur on approximately 9,600 acres per year during the first ten years.

B. ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE ALTERNATIVE

Every alternative considered in the Final EIS is technically feasible and capable of being implemented. Each alternative would have a different set of impacts on the environment.

Alternative 1 is the environmentally preferable alternative when the physical, biological, economic, and social factors are weighed in balance. Potential adverse physical and biological impacts will be controlled by the mitigation measures disclosed in the Final EIS, Chapter IV, Mitigation

Summary of Environmental Consequences. These mitigation measures will ensure that when impacts occur they will be the minimum impact practical and will be within limits established by laws, regulations and policy where standards exist, and based upon best professional judgement where established standards do not exist.

C. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Forest Service has conducted an active public involvement program. Federal, State and local agencies have been informed and consulted throughout the planning effort. Forest users have had an opportunity to participate. See Chapter VI, Page VI-1 of the Final EIS.

A Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS for the Forest Plan was published in the Federal Register November 14, 1980.

The planning effort included 12 scoping meetings during September 1981, conducted in local communities and Denver. Open house meetings were conducted in November 1981, at the ranger district offices. These open houses were designed to give the public an opportunity to review preliminary alternatives, including land use allocations, output levels, and management direction.

The Forest Service has coordinated the Cannibal Plateau Further Planning Area Wilderness Suitability analysis with the Bureau of Land Management. This includes notification that on December 30, 1982, the Secretary of the Interior formally released Slungullion Slide and Sparling Gulch-Friends Creek from further wilderness study and Interior management protection.

The Forest Service initiated the Office of Management and Budget Circular A-95 Clearing House review process twice during the planning effort. In August 1981, the Forest submitted to the State Clearinghouse the Analysis of the Management Situation for review and comment. The State Clearinghouse was contacted again on October 25, 1982. At the second contact the Clearinghouse received copies of the Draft EIS, Proposed Plan, and Draft Fossil Ridge Wilderness Study Report for review and comment.

The Draft EIS, Proposed Plan, and Draft Fossil Ridge Wilderness Study Report were filed with the Environmental Protection Agency October 25, 1982. The Notice of Availability was published in the Federal Register November 11, 1982. Other Federal Register notices included: Application of Coal Unsuitability Criteria, November 9, 1982, and Fossil Ridge Wilderness Study Hearing Notice, December 9, 1982. A conference was held for media representatives on November 8, 1982, at the Forest Supervisor's Office in Delta. The conference objective was to present a Forest planning overview for media use. Information was presented on legislative history, Draft EIS and Proposed Plan role and content, significant management changes, and how to participate during the public comment period.

Open house meetings were held at local Forest Offices and at the Regional Office in Denver. The open house objectives met were: Explain the role of Forest Planning, Proposed Plan content, management changes, and land use allocations to the public; answer questions; and explain how to comment on the Draft EIS. Open houses were conducted in Collbran, Delta, Grand Junction, Gunnison, Lake City, Lakewood, Montrose, Norwood, and Paonia, Colorado. A total of 151 persons registered at the open houses.

Two hearings were conducted dealing with wilderness suitability of Fossil Ridge Wilderness Study Area. The hearings were conducted in Gunnison and Denver, Colorado. A total of 173 people registered at the hearings; 73 made statements for the record.

A total of 324 comments were received from individuals, organizations, Federal, State, and local governments. All comments were documented and incorporated into the Forest Planning records.

Comments received on the Draft EIS and Proposed Plan, issues and concerns identified during the scoping process, and other comments have been considered in this Final EIS and used to identify the proposed action.

D. PLANNING RECORDS

Planning Actions are documents which contain the detailed information and decisions used in developing the Forest Plan and EIS as required in 36 CFR 219.5(b) through (k) (1979). Similar activities are required in the 1982 NFMA regulations 36 CFR 219.12.

All of the documentation chronicling the Forest Planning process is available for inspection during regular business hours at:

Forest Supervisor's Office
Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre,
and Gunnison National Forests
2250 U. S. Highway 50
Delta, Colorado, 81416
303 - 874-7691

These records known as Planning Actions are incorporated by reference into the Final EIS and Plan.

VII. IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

The Forest Plan will be monitored to verify that scheduled activities are implemented and the anticipated outputs are produced. The goals, objectives, general direction, and standards and guidelines will be evaluated regularly to assess their validity and accomplishment.

An annual monitoring program will be prepared as part of the Forest's annual work program. This program will include the details of the monitoring to be accomplished. Monitoring will be based on the approved work program and funds available. Specific locations, sampling intensity, person-days required, and costs will be identified in the annual monitoring program. Evaluation of the results of the site-specific monitoring program will be evaluated each year. The significance of the results will be analyzed and evaluated by the Forest Interdisciplinary Team and reviewed for action by the Management Team.

All practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm have been adopted. See Mitigation Summary of Environmental Consequences, Chapter IV, Final EIS. The monitoring program will be used to help ensure that mitigation measures are applied and whether the mitigation is effectively minimizing environmental damage.

The Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forest's Plan will not be implemented sooner than 30 days after the Notice of Availability of the EIS, Proposed Plan, and Record of Decision appears in the Federal Register, except for the 90-day waiting period discussed later in this section. The time needed to bring all activities into compliance with the Forest Plan will vary depending on the type of project. Most operation and maintenance activities, projects in the first year of development, new special use proposals, and transfers of existing permits can be brought into compliance with the Plan the first year of implementation. Existing projects, as well as contractual obligations, will continue as planned. However, during the implementation, the following requirements, as a minimum and subject to valid existing rights will be met:

--The Forest Supervisor will assure that annual program proposals and projects are consistent with the Plan;

--Program budget proposals and objectives are consistent with management direction specified in the Plan; and

--Implementation is in compliance with the Regional Guide and 36 CFR 219.10(e) and 219.11(d).

All National Forest System uses proposed subsequent to this decision will be reviewed for consistency with the Forest Plan. As soon as practicable, subject to valid existing rights, the Forest Supervisor will ensure that all permits, contracts, and other instruments for occupancy and use are consistent with the Forest plan management direction [16 USC 1604(i) and 36 CFR 219.10(e)].

On the portion of Cannibal Plateau FPA identified unsuitable for wilderness in this decision, the Chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and the Chairman of the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee will be notified by letter of this recommendation. No Plan activities will take place on the area determined to be unsuitable until a 90 day period while Congress is in session has passed. The 90 day period begins on the date that EPA's Notice of Availability of the Final EIS, Record of Decision, and Plan appear in the Federal Register.

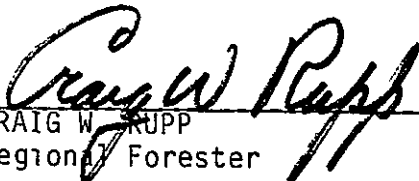
Until Congress acts, the recommended suitable portion of Cannibal Plateau FPA will be managed to maintain its existing wilderness character while still allowing existing uses. Livestock grazing and dispersed motorized recreation will continue and range structures can be maintained or constructed.

VIII. RIGHT TO ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 211.18 (Federal Register, Vol. 48, No. 63, March 31, 1983, pages 13420 to 13426). Notice of appeal must be in writing and submitted to:

Craig Rupp, Regional Forester
Rocky Mountain Region
USDA Forest Service
11177 W. 8th Avenue
Lakewood, Colorado 80225

Appeal notice must be submitted within 45 days from the date of this decision.
A statement of reasons to support the appeal and any request for oral presentation must be filed within the 45 day period for filing a notice of appeal.


CRAIG W. RUPP
Regional Forester

September 29, 1983
Date